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A  
FREE AND CANDID  
PROFESSION OF FAITH;  
OR,  
MOTIVES AND REASONS  
FOR  
LEAVING THE ROMISH RELIGION  
AND  
ACCEDING TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

FREE AND CANDID  
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MOTIVATIONS  
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ACCORDING TO THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND





O R,  
MOTIVES AND REASONS

*Heretofore a Roman Catholic Clergyman.*

and the same judgment. 1 Cor. i. 10.

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A FREE AND CANDID  
PROFESSION OF FAITH, &c.

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**I** WAS born a subject of Great-Britain, and went young to college into a foreign country, where I was educated in the principles of the church of Rome, and took holy orders.—But when a spirit of free, and impartial inquiry was awakened within me, I turned my thoughts to consider the Established Religion of England. The light, which it has pleased Divine Providence to send out upon us in these our days, must make many candid minds sensible that they have been led by education wide of truth; and have been taught to revere for christian revelation the erroneous doctrines of men.

It is a disagreeable situation to differ in opinion upon any interesting subject from all around us: not to conform to general established modes of things, is an awkward situation. The inquisitive mind is naturally led to inquire into the motives, and reasons of dissention, and nonconformity. To impeach one's country of violating the christian faith; to arraign it for resisting the revealed will of heaven; and setting up a religion in opposition to what God has ordained; is what no man should dare presume to take upon himself to do without being possessed of the most glaring, and irresistible evidence.



Now, my mind recoiled at the idea that such a heavy charge should be brought against the wisdom, virtue, and piety of England. Religion, and one's country, are the two chief concerns; the dearest interest of man. Religion indeed demands the precedence; her voice must be listened to in preference to the commands of the rulers of the people: *for God must be obeyed, rather than men.* But then we must be aware not to be imposed upon by prejudice, nor duped by bigotry.

The christian patriot well knows, that the happiness of society in a good measure depends on the union of the minds, and hearts of the individuals that constitute it: he is fully sensible that unanimity, and harmony among countrymen and brethren are the sources of the greatest blessings; and will contribute, as much as in him lies, to promote general concord.

It is difficult indeed for men to be all of one mind. It is only a strong blaze of evidence that can produce unanimity. Truth must shine, like the sun in a pure sky, with meridian effulgence for all men to agree in their sense of things. But alas! the present state of mankind is overcast with much darkness. Mists of error are ever arising from the passions, and ignorance of the children of the world; which continually brood over the human understanding, and prevent it from having a clear sight of truth. According to the nature of the medium through which the rays pass, and the temper of the eye of the observer, different apprehensions are conceived; various opinions are formed, which are exclusively held, and maintained for the truth. But the liberal man that is zealous only for the doctrine, that was first delivered by the unerring oracles of heaven; will

will try his country's cause, and not continue in opposition to it, if it be just, and true.

Every rational member of society, if he finds himself engaged by education in a dissent from the established religion of his country, should, when reason has acquired her full vigour, enter upon a free, and candid inquiry; and not suffer himself to be held in bondage by illiberal prejudices in the servitude of error. Nothing is more apt to estrange men from one another and to embitter their social intercourse, than variance in religious sentiments. The christian patriot should then examine fairly whether truth really requires that he should dissent from the general belief; and should be resolved to withdraw his concurrence in the support of a dissent, if upon an impartial discussion it appears that true religion by no means demands it. In homage to truth he will acknowledge the errors education had entangled him in; and reverence the wisdom, and piety of the church of the land.

The power of education is great upon the human mind. Under the direction of those to whom unexperienced youth looks up with implicit deference, infant reason may be attuned to any system of opinions; and the zeal of the heart may be biased in favour of any cause. The raw soul, like clay in the hands of the potter, will easily admit any impression; and may be wrought up by the tutoring hand to any particular frame. The first principles that are ingrafted, whatever they may be, take deep root; and grow up into incontestible truths; they are held sacred, and generally constitute the test to which the religious tenets of others are brought. The mind thus biased, and prepossessed finds it difficult in-

deed to think with impartiality; it is influenced in its judgments by the first elements of thought, which were admitted as unquestionable principles before the understanding was adequate to judge of them; and approves, or condemns, according to the standard of truth and falsehood, according to the rule of right and wrong, it has been tutored to form its estimate of things by. If we wish to come to the knowledge of truth; we must mistrust the first imbibed notions; we must break the shackles that prejudice has fettered the powers of our soul with, and allow improved and enlightened reason the free exertion of her faculties. What was adopted at a period when the authority of teachers framed our opinions, should be closely pried into and strictly examined when we have learnt to think for ourselves. Unbiaſſed, and serious thought should repair the perversion education may have introduced into our judgments; and settle such principles in our mind as sound reason will countenance.

But what is truth? and where are we to search for it? How ascertain it amidst the maze of opinions, that human wit has created to bewilder the inquisitive mind? Our most gracious God has set up a light among the sons of men to make manifest to them what truth is. But many false lights have likewise arisen from the earth, to lead astray and to delude the unwary into mistaken notions. Clouds of human conceits have darkened the revelation of Divine Wisdom; and the truth of God is obscured by the doctrines and traditions of men. Yet amidst our present darkness and confusion of knowledge we have a sure word of prophecy to which we must attend, *as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn.*



*dawn.* We must search the writings of the holy men of God, who have spoken from the inspiration of the spirit of truth. These sacred oracles of heaven will instruct us in all the words of life, which they received to deliver out unto men, that the world might be sanctified by the truth.

Humanity is so tempered, that in the course of ages the most sacred truths are liable to be blended with the doctrines of the spirit of error. To clear the one from the other; to separate what is human from what is divine; and ascertain the pure revelation of God; we must explore with the eye of reason in the light of the gospel the system of theology, transmitted to us from past ages. Thus we may hope to have a clear fight of the truth, which God has revealed to shew us the way to life and immortality.

Religion is the most important concern man has to attend to; it is a personal interest of high importance, that should engage the most serious attention of the mind. No one should suffer himself to be driven on, by the imperious controul of custom, in the path he may chance to have been put into at the beginning of his career through life. In contempt even of the authority that is hurrying him away, he should step aside to consider the ways he is pursuing; and not servilely, and stupidly run round the circle of established notions. When we have reached a certain height of mental improvement, we should then make a stand, and commune with ourselves; we should seriously examine the nature of religion; consider what it teaches, and what it enjoins; and then look into the system of religion education has engaged us in, to see whether what that

requires of us to believe, and practise in order to be acceptable to heaven, be all countenanced by right reason, and the unerring word of truth.

Impressed with these principles I applied my mind to a free discussion of the Roman system of religion; and took an impartial view of the reformation of the church of England. In the present liberal, and enlightened age, we may hope to conceive a just sense of things, and to be able to frame a right judgment of the memorable event, that renewed the face of the religion of this country. Deference is certainly due to the authority of superior wisdom, and learning. But then we are not to permit the energy of our mental powers to be compressed to inactivity by the word of overbearing authority; nor ingloriously bear our judgments to be held in captivity by assuming dogmatists. The great Author of all things has given to man faculties of thought, that he may exert them in the search of truth. We are to try the spirits; and not blindly resign up the sentiments of our own understanding; nor yield implicit acquiescence to the confident assertions of our fellow-creatures. God has impressed on the human mind a bright image of himself; he has wrought up in the moral constitution of man a sense to feel what is just, and right; he has endued it with a faculty to discern the evidence of truth: and it is only by a right use of the noble prerogatives of our nature that we please our Creator. It is only a reasonable service that is acceptable to the Almighty; it is not a blind deference for presumptuous doctrines; nor a servile observance of the precepts of men, that constitutes the religion that God delights in. Before the mind gives  
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its assent to any article, that is proposed to its belief, it should examine the motives of credibility; and withhold its acquiescence, till such time as it is convinced on just evidence of the truth of the doctrine. We are not to captivate our understanding to the obedience of faith, till reason is satisfied as to the evidence of the revelation.

God has appointed reason the guardian of man to lead him to the knowledge of truth through the crowd of errors, and prejudices, that beset him on all sides, busy in endeavouring to seduce him. He hath charged it to be ever vigilant not to let its ward be imposed upon by deceitful spirits. Faithful to its high commission, nothing should escape its scrutinizing eye; no principle should be allowed to pass unquestioned; every doctrine, before it be admitted, should be considered with narrow search, and deep inspection. When heaven deigns to reveal to mankind any of its unsearchable, and incomprehensible counsels; it stamps them with its broad-seal, that reason may see the warrant; and may forego all vain scrutiny. When reason hears the word of God, it listens in respectful silence; it bends in profound homage at the voice of eternal truth; and warns its pupil to captivate all the powers of his understanding to the obedience of faith, for the all-wise Being has spoken. An assent given to any doctrine, that has not the approbation of sound reason; or that is not recommended by the clear word of God; is weak, irrational credulity.

No order of men has the exclusive privilege of understanding the words of revelation: those to whom God gives discernment may discover through the inspired scriptures the truth that leads to life, and immortality.



talities. The gospel dispensation invests no individual; nor any assembly of men with the prerogative of infallibility to dictate to christians what is the faith of Christ. The messenger from God has clearly, and distinctly delivered the words of life; and those that have ears to hear, may hear and understand. The Spirit of God, that leads into all truth, is promised alike, and given to all true believers: yet it has been exclusively appropriated by the managers of the religion of nations. They have constituted themselves the church of God; and would fain make every creature captivate his understanding in obedience to their word: they fondly imagine that they are the pillar and support of truth; and call upon christians to hear them as the infallible oracles of heaven.

Several passages are produced from scripture to support the pretensions of the church of Rome to infallibility. But when perused with an impartial eye, they by no means sanction the claim. The letter must be strained to be brought to countenance the notion that a promise of infallibility is made to the exterior ministry of the church to secure them from error in giving decisions on contested points. If the least violence be offered to the word, a strong suspicion immediately arises, that it is not candour, nor impartiality that interprets; but that some passion of the heart is interested in the exposition.

Were infallibility insured to the exterior ministry of the church by the word of God; the obvious meaning would be to the purpose; the slightest attention would suffice to satisfy every candid inquirer as to the privilege conferred; for it is only the plain import of the letter

letter that can decide the point in question. The exertion of the prerogative must be superseded, till the investiture be proved by clear evidence.

*Thou art Peter (Cephas,) and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matt. 16. 18.)*

*All power is given to me in heaven, and in earth. Go ye therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you: and behold, I am with you alway unto the end of the world. (Matt. 28.)*

*The church of the living God is the pillar and ground of truth. (1. Tim. 3. 15.)*

The meaning of these passages must be ascertained, and determined independently of the authority it is presumed they establish.

Now on an attentive perusal of them, the sense that first offers itself to the candid, and unbiassed reader, and that seems to be the only one agreeable to the tenor of the gospel, is as follows:

Jesus puts the question to his disciples, whom they believed him to be. Simon Bar Jona declared him to be the Christ, *the Son of the living God*. This declaration Jesus approves of, as the only one agreeable to truth. It was not the light of human wisdom, but the eternal Father that is in heaven, that revealed this mystery to Peter; and Jesus assures him that this dogma is the rock on which his church was to be built.

Whoever believes in his heart, and confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, is built on a rock, that cannot be overthrown by all the united powers of darkness.

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He will stand firm and immoveable amidst all the assaults of the prince of this world. Satan has no power against those who are strengthened with all might in the inner man by faith in Jesus. All the attempts of wicked adversaries to destroy will be rendered vain by the armour of salvation.

Our blessed Saviour has engaged his word, that his church, which is built on the rock, on the faith in Christ the Son of the living God, shall stand to the end of time. In vain will all the legions of hell unite to banish from the earth this life-giving principle. The firm foundation of God will stand fast to the consummation of the world; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. God will form in all periods of time, by the power of his grace and the influence of his spirit, men after his own heart, adorers in spirit and truth through the mediator that is given.

The church of the living God, the chosen band of wise and holy men, whom the Lord purifies to himself, from all the children of corruption that inhabit the earth, is the pillar and support of truth. Those who have seen by faith the Lord's Christ and have been sealed with the spirit of promise, will maintain truth against those who impugn it, and will not be afraid of being worsted in the contest.

St. Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, teacheth his beloved son in the faith how to behave *in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth*. It is not the exterior ministry, the body of teachers, that are exclusively called the pillars of truth, but the church of God, *those who are called to be saints*.

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The regenerated children of God form a mystical body, of which Christ Jesus is the head; a body renewed in vigour and in the sprightliness and floridity of primitive justice and truth. *Christ delivered himself for the church of true believers; he sanctified and purified it by the word of life, that he might present to himself a glorious church, having no spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it might be holy and without blemish.* (Eph. 5.) The members of this mystical body are replenished with the fulness of Christ; the deformities of the *old man* are done away by the sanctifying influence of the spirit of holiness; and all the defilements of iniquity are removed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The servants of God, that are renewed in the spirit of their minds, judge not of things according to the deceitful maxims of flesh and blood: they are not directed by the spirit, that worketh in the children of disobedience, but by the suggestions and dictates of the Spirit of truth, that is put into them. These holy men that are scattered through all the earth, as the luminaries of the world, constitute the church that is the pillar and ground of truth.

Our blessed Saviour enjoined his apostles, to go and proclaim to nations, that he was the Christ the Son of the living God, that was come from the bosom of the Father to deliver to the children of men, words of truth and life. To encourage them to exert themselves in the ministry, he assures them that he will be with them in their labours; that he will give them strength to bear up against all the difficulties they may have to encounter in the discharge of their commission; that he will temper their souls with resolution and courage to stand undaunted

daunted even unto death, in the ministry of the word of salvation.

Christ Jesus will likewise be with all the faithful dispensers of the mysteries of God, to the consummation of the world.

This I conceive to be the true exposition of the passages under examination; it is in harmony with the whole tenor of the christian scheme; we may therefore with reason presume it to be agreeable to truth.

We are not then to heed the voice of dogmatical presumption. We must attend to the dictates of enlightened reason; we must search the scriptures to learn the revelation of the wisdom of God. The doctrines that men teach for articles of faith, must be tried by the touchstone of the word of God; and none admitted as such, but upon the evidence of truth.

The oracle of heaven speaks to all the children of men, that have understanding; his words are neither obscure nor ambiguous; but are easy to be comprehended by those, whose judgments are not darkened by corruption, nor perverted by error and earthly prejudices. Wisdom, *that brightness of the everlasting light, that enters into holy souls* and chafeth the darkness of ignorance, makes manifest to spiritual men the truth of the word of God. The divine principle of knowledge that is in man, when the mists of error and prejudice are scattered from before it, can discern the pure light of the revelation of heaven; and when invigorated by the breath of the Holy Spirit, it can search the profound things of God; it can pry into the scriptures, and discover the spiritual doctrine, they contain. It does not surpass the sagacity of the human soul to ascertain

certain the meaning of the words which the Divine Spirit has uttered by the prophets of the Lord. It is not necessary to call in a human infallible interpreter to expound the sense that is inclosed in the letter; whosoever is wise in every age, and in every climate; and that pondereth the word of God, will catch the spirit of truth; and will be made wise through faith unto salvation.

It is not with any particular nation; nor with any particular body of men that the covenant of grace is made. The joyful sound of salvation is gone out into the whole earth; and through all generations those who hear and believe with unfeigned faith, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds, are added to the church of the living God, that is built on the rock, which is Christ.

Particular churches of exterior professors of the gospel may decay and wither; the abomination of desolation may be set up in places that were once holy: But the sun of righteousness shall never be extinguished; many waters cannot quench it; nor all the floods of error and corruption drown it. The revelation of God's mercy will ever shine clear amidst darkness; and those who are enlightened will clearly see what the children of unbelief are blind to. The chosen few according to the election of grace will obtain the gift of faith; and perpetuate the church of true believers, that shall stand firm to the end of time.

Tho' corruptions, and errors should deluge the whole earth, so that it might appear there was no faith to be found among men: Yet God would put the knowledge and love of Christ into the hearts of his elect,  
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and preserve them from the general contagion. The temple which God has built on the rock of ages shall even as Mount Sion stand fast for ever; all the united efforts of the powers of this darkness shall in vain attempt to overthrow it. Under the tabernacle of God the children of faith, that have *heard the word of truth, and have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*, are assembled; they dwell secure under the protection of the Most High, and offer spiritual sacrifices to their Lord and Redeemer.

When christianity became the public religion of the empire, the truth of God was exposed to be defiled by the ignorance of the prophane multitude; the purity of the spiritual religion of Jesus, was in danger of being polluted with the superstition of the pagan world. And indeed, we soon perceive mists of error gathering over the doctrine that was delivered to the first believers. Men were not satisfied with the plain words of truth and life; they attempted to be more wise than it behoved them to be. Various opinions were formed upon objects, that are seen but darkly through a glass; and the surmises of human ignorance were blended with the necessary doctrine of salvation. In the first ages of christianity, parties were ever wrangling about hard and unintelligible words, borrowed from a vain philosophy; and the world was violently agitated by disputes upon subtle questions, which the presumption of man had rashly proposed about the mysteries of the gospel. Councils were held against councils; bishops stood in warm opposition to bishops, hurling anathemas at each other; And the stronger party, those who could gain the religion of the emperor to their side, and arm themselves

themselves with power, set up their creed as the standard of orthodoxy ; and zealously persecuted those who refused to subscribe their scheme of belief. In the course of time, the wisdom, and truth of God, which came bright from heaven were darkened by thick clouds of human conceits, and fancies : and many doctrines which men had framed, were tacked to the gospel as articles of faith ; and imposed with bitter zeal on the belief of christians. At this remote period, if we wish to come to the knowledge of the pure revelation of God, we must not take upon credit the system of theology that we find in school-dictates. We must disregard prejudices ; and go back to the days of the apostles and prophets, to learn from them the truths, that were revealed from heaven.

If after having meditated upon the scriptures, and perused the records and documents of primitive christianity, in order to form a just apprehension of the christian scheme, we turn our attention to examine the state of religion in the world, at the period that just preceded the reformation ; we can no where recognise the amiable, and noble features of the religion of Jesus. The holy covenant of the Lord is disfigured, and corrupted in every point, by the mean impertinences of degenerate ages ; on all sides we discover the marks of the narrowness and littleness of the human mind ; ignorance has perverted, and superstition has debased every just and true principle. When we read the dispensations of God, as they are recorded in the inspired pages, our minds are ennobled with grand and exalted ideas ; we cannot but magnify the Lord for his wonderful works ; we glow with gratitude for his tender mer-

cies to mankind, and cannot refrain from breaking out in songs of praise and benediction. But when we consider the religious creed, the doctrines and practices of the established religion of the world at the period of the reformation; in vain do we seek for the fair, and lovely forms of truth and sound doctrine, such as the word of God delineates, in vain do we inquire after the sacred wisdom; that descended from heaven to pay it our reverence; we only find the blunders of ignorance, the wisdom of a dark world fashioned into systems, and held out to the belief of nations as the gospel of Christ. We only meet with a hollow phantom, a hideous spectre of superstition to which people are enslaved. All that the apostles had foretold was to happen in the christian world in the days of degeneracy, we see fully realized. The sacred foundations of the gospel are profaned with gothic superstructures; monsters of absurdities, and errors have taken up their abode on the hallowed ground, and made primitive truth and wisdom retire; monuments of folly in various shapes appear on every quarter; superstition is every where observed to be busy in entertaining and amusing its deluded votaries with baubles. There is no virtue, no wisdom in the public religion; there is no beauty to charm the mind, no excellence to delight. The righteousness of the Lord is forgotten, and his true knowledge is not in the public mind. Piety, justice and charity, the corner-stones of religion, the foundations which God himself had laid, were dug under and removed; and a misshapen fabrick had been raised on the rudiments of human ignorance, and on beggarly elements of the earth. The pure essence, the fundamental articles, the heavenly principles of the  
gospel



gospel were little attended to. The conceits of dark generations, vain speculations, incomprehensible mysteries of man's invention, and doctrines, which pride and ambition had devised, had gained the credit of necessary articles of religion. Superstitious vanities, frivolous duties, unprofitable austerities were thought to be meritorious, and were inculcated as the service that was acceptable to heaven.

In short, such is the complexion of the religion, which the dark and gothic ages had framed, that no resemblance can be discovered between it, and the religion of the primitive ages of christianity, when the gospel doctrine was received with simplicity of heart, and was cherished with a pure zeal.

*The world groaned at the period when the spirit of reformation was roused; the world groaned under a vast load of human institutions; of scholastical opinions and dogmas: it groaned under the tyranny of mendicant friars, who tho' the satellites of the see of Rome, were yet so increased in number and power, as to become formidable to the Popes themselves, nay even to Kings. As long as the Pope does what tends to promote their interest, they extol him above the Deity; but if he presumes to thwart their convenience, he is no more in their eyes than an empty shadow. I do not, (it is Erasmus that speaks) I do not impeach them all, but the greatest part of them are of this stamp; they labour to entangle men's consciences, either to draw money from them, or to subject them to their tyranny. Their impudence was carried to such a pitch, that they no more spoke of Jesus Christ; they were wholly occupied in preaching their new and impertinent dogmas. They spoke of indulgences in a manner to disgust the most ignorant.*

*ignorant. Thus the authority of the evangelical doctrine was seen by degrees to disappear, and religion was sinking fast into ceremonies more empty than those of the Jews. \**

Abuses were become so enormous and so insulting to every just principle, that a reformation was loudly called for from every quarter. And it pleased God in his own good time, to raise up men to wake the world from its profound sleep in ignorance and superstition; and to rouse nations to a sense of the true knowledge of the Lord. Who but must bless providence when religion is restored to its primitive engaging beauty? Who but must be transported with joy to see the sun of truth, arise on the benighted world to give light to them that sit in darkness? The earth should ring with shouts of joy to hail the first dawn of wisdom after a long night of ignorance; and magnify the tender mercies of God, *whereby the day sprang from on high hath visited us* and brought us out of the darkness of degeneracy and superstition, into the marvellous light of the gospel.

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\* *Mundus oneratus est constitutionibus humanis; oneratus est opinionibus et dogmatibus scholasticis, tyrannide fratrum mendicantium, qui cum sint satellites sedis Romanæ, tamen eo potentiæ, ac multitudinis evadunt ut ipsi Romano pontifici, atque ipsis adeo regibus sint formidabiles. His cum pro ipsis facit pontifex, plus quam deus est: in his quæ faciunt adversus eorum commodum, non plus valet quam somnium. Non damno omnes, sed plurimi sunt hujus generis, qui ob quæstum et tyrannidam data opera illaqueant conscientias hominum. Ac perfricta fronte jam cæperant omisso Christo nihil prædicare, nisi sua nova, et subinde impudentiora dogmata. De indulgentiis sic loquebantur, ut nec Idiotæ feere possent. His, et ejusmodi multis rebus paulatim evanescebat vigor evangelicæ doctrinæ; et futurum erat ut rebus semper in deterius prolabantibus tandem prorsus extingueretur illa scintilla christianæ pietatis, undi reaccendi poterat extincta charitas: ad ceremonias plusquam judaicæ summa religionis vergebat. Suspirant, ac deplorant boni viri, &c. (Epis. Erasmi ad Albert. Arch. Mog.)*

The church of England, enlightened by the light that broke in upon Europe at the æra of the reformation, saw with concern the abuses and corruptions, that disfigured christianity; and which long prescription and custom had consecrated for evangelical truths. Zealous with knowledge, she stripped her religion of the mummeries of superstition; errors were scattered before her wisdom, till the gospel shone in its primitive brightness over the land.

Pride, that busy and restless passion in the human breast, soon crept into the administration of the religion of the gospel. That spirit of ambition which our Divine Saviour checked in his apostles, manifested itself later in their successors; and converted into a temporality the spiritual kingdom of Christ. The bishops of Rome, established their throne on the ruins of imperial grandeur and power, and domineered in the name of Christ over nations as the princes of the earth.

Our Divine Master cautions his disciples not to act as the scribes and pharisees, who sat in the chair of Moses and delighted to be called *Rabbi*. *Be not you called Rabbi, for you have one Master, and you are all brethren. And call no one your Father upon earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven. Neither be ye called Master, for you have one Master in Christ. He that is the greatest among you, shall be your servant. And he that shall exalt himself, shall be humbled, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.* These are the rules of conduct left on record for the disciples of Jesus; but they were in later ages disregarded, and the gospel was corrupted to abet a system of dominion and arbitrary sway. The bishop of



Rome claims pre-eminence; he challenges by divine right the primacy of honour and jurisdiction over all christian churches.

The gospel is a scheme of mercy; it is a lesson of purity and holiness, and is by no means concerned with worldly affairs, with the mean interests of the passions of corrupt nature. The religion of the gospel is spiritual, and is wholly unconnected with all forms of human policy. It is not its design to establish any kind of dominion; its purpose is to shew mercy and teach righteousness, and not to exalt the proud and ambitious, and to humble the meek. No power is countenanced by the christian dispensation, but what is necessary to promote the edification of christians. Every church of believers is vested with the plenitude of authority, to regulate its own œconomy; and is authorized to manage its own concerns, and to consult its own edification, without any controul from foreign ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The gospel gives no exclusive approbation to any particular system of administration; it has sanctioned no form of hierarchy. Ministers were indeed ordained to teach and preach the words of truth and life. Faithful men must be selected from the body of believers, who may be thoroughly instructed in the knowledge of Christ; and may be able to teach others, and to stir up their brethren by admonition and exhortation, to the practice of holiness. But it was left to the wisdom and prudence of the different churches, to establish whatever species of ecclesiastical government the peculiar circumstances, and manners of people may require, for the peace and happiness of the community. Provided things be done decently, and according to order; provided harmony and concord be preserved, and  
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all be done for edification; it is of no essential moment what form of polity be adopted. If Christ Jesus be preached; if the interest of righteousness be advanced; the gospel is indifferent as to what form of hierarchy is established. It exalts no individual among the believers to be the idol, to which the primacy of honour must be offered.

There is indeed but one God, one faith and one baptism, that can cleanse the soul from guilt, and one Holy Spirit that can sanctify it in true holiness. But there may be many forms of administration, and many separate and independent churches, that may observe different modes of worship, and practise various rites and ceremonies. Uniformity of religious service is by no means essential to christian unity. What unites all christians into one universal church is the adoring the same God, and believing in his Christ, and acknowledging the influence of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Lord of heaven and earth is worshipped, and the gospel of his Son believed, and righteousness is practised; there is the catholic church, whatever exterior form may have obtained by the influence of circumstances, or whatever opinions may be entertained on objects that are seen but darkly through a glass. Charity is the bond that should unite all christians into one sheep-fold, under their head Christ Jesus, and not unity of jurisdiction.

When the ecclesiastical jurisprudence was first settled, the east and west formed but one empire. Hence the church, as well as the state, was framed into one government, upon the same scale of dependence and subordination as obtained in the political administration. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction was limited and fixt upon the plan of

established civil jurisdiction. The centre of power and authority was placed in the metropolis of the empire; and the Pontiff at Rome was the last resort in all the disputes and contentions, that arose in the administration of the religion of the empire. His opinion, as bishop of the most eminent city, could not fail of having great weight and influence in all religious controversies. The unitarian form of government, which was given to the church by the political state of the world when christianity first became the predominant religion of nations; was afterwards consecrated by long custom; and insisted upon as a necessary point of the christian institution. The order of things that obtained in the world by the power of circumstances, was in later ages thought to be essential; and that by altering it, the order established by Christ was subverted.

The church of England at the period of the reformation, broke the cords that held her in captivity to foreign jurisdiction. She asserted her right, as a national church, of being the only competent judge of the discipline to be adopted; and of the forms of worship to be observed within her boundaries. The governors of the several particular churches are qualified and authorized to regulate all things by their wisdom and piety, without any controul from a foreign bishop; and to fix the modes of worship to be observed, as times and circumstances may require for the public good, and edification of the church committed to their care and vigilance.

I shall not enter upon the unpleasant fields of controversy; it were to no purpose. Yet I must say a few words upon one of the principal tenets of the church of Rome, which must ever be a stumbling-block to thinking men,



men, as it claffeth with the very firft elements of thought, and is repugnant to common fenfe. If our fenfes are not to be credited when they bear testimony concerning things that are their proper objects; we can have no fure knowledge, and all muft be delufion.

It is not by the letter, but by the fpirit of the letter, that we are to afcertain the truths Chrift has taught. Not to fall into error we muft carefully avoid confidering figurative fpeech to be literal. If we are fo dull and ftupid, as not to be able to difcern the import of metaphorical language, we may give exiftence in our imagination to abfurdities, which it were highly injurious to fuppofe were ever taught by infinite wifdom.

The Divine Author of our faith delighted to break the bread of life for the children of men; he was ever folicitous to explain by the moft familiar fimilitudes the fpiritual truths he was fent to make known. The messenger from God was fenfible, that the myfteries of the kingdom of heaven, he was fent to reveal, were hard to be underftood by the inhabitants of the earth, whose minds are impregnated with carnal prejudices; and it was his earneft and affiduous concern to affift our dulnefs of comprehension, by the moft expreffive modes of fpeech. To enable us to catch a fenfe of the vivifying truths, which he had received from the Father to communicate to us, he is ever endeavouring to abftract our thoughts from earthly notions. And furely he would not increafe our perplexity, by introducing into the fphere of vifible things new and diftracting myfteries. The mere fhape of the letter will not induce us to fancy that our Eternal Friend created a myftery, which the nature of things by no means required, to confound and baffle the fmall fhare of wifdom that falls to the lot of man.

Our

Our Blessed Lord is ever intent to seize every opportunity to impress on the mind a sense of the advantages of faith in him, whom God had sent to be the Saviour of the world.

As mention had been made by the Jews of the manna their Fathers had eaten in the desert, Christ takes occasion to speak of the spiritual food that gives life to the soul; he compares himself to bread; he assures them that he is the *true bread, that came down from heaven, that whosoever comes to him and believes in him, shall never hunger nor thirst*. The Jews murmured at what he had said; they could not comprehend his meaning; their minds were unused to spiritual conceptions. To remove all obscurity and to speak the plain truth, Jesus positively tells them, that whosoever believes in him, has life everlasting. *Verily, verily, I say to you, he that believeth on me hath life everlasting.* (John 6.) To insinuate, if possible, the vivifying principle into the dull understanding of the Jews, Jesus continues to teach the same truth variously; he puts it in different lights, that they might be led to conceive what was the true bread of life. Your Fathers ate manna in the desert and died; but the bread, which I offer you, is far more excellent; it nourisheth to life eternal, *whosoever eats of the bread that I give, shall not die*. The manna your Fathers ate supported a short transitory life; but the bread, I give, will feed you to life that shall never perish. *I am the living bread, that came down from heaven; if any one shall eat of this bread, he shall live for ever*. Jesus then informs them what this bread is, that is to give everlasting life. *The bread I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.*

The

The bread that gives life to our souls is the sacrifice of the propitiation for sin. The redeemer of mankind purchased life for the children of men, that were under the curse of the fall, by the sufferings of his flesh: the Son of God gave his flesh to be tortured and crucified, to satisfy divine justice, and procure by his obedience even unto death eternal redemption, for those who should believe in him. The carnal-minded Jews took offence again, not being able to comprehend, though expounded in the most insinuating manner, the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven: they could not form to themselves the faintest conception of the mystery of faith, though laid open to them by the plainest and most expressive metaphors. They entered into a warm debate among themselves, saying, *how can this man give us his flesh to eat?* Jesus then declares solemnly, that except *they eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, they shall not have life in them.* There is no other means under the heavens appointed, by which man can be saved from death, than faith in him who offered himself an atonement for the sins of the world. Except we eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood; except we apply by faith the merits of Christ's sufferings and death to our souls, we shall have no principle of life in us. This is the great truth the gospel has revealed; and it is put by our blessed Saviour in the strongest light possible; human language could not give it a more forcible exposition. But then to remove every gross idea, that the carnal figure might excite, and to do away the offence the Jews and his disciples took at his words; Jesus warns them in plain language, that they must not understand his speech in a carnal, but in a spiritual sense; that they were not really



ly to eat the body they saw; *it is the Spirit, that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken to you, they are spirit and life.* We must feed by faith on the sacrifice which the person of Christ has rendered effectual for the propitiation of sin; we must draw from the Spirit the principle of immortality. Why, says St. Austin, commenting on the sixth chapter of St. John, *Why do ye prepare teeth and a stomach; believe and ye have eaten?* § It is a gross and stupid error to understand the eating of the flesh of the Son of God, in any other than a spiritual manner. And it is equally gross and stupid to imagine that in the sacrament we eat the real flesh of our Redeemer.

As Christ came to give life to the world, a metaphor taken from the chief supports of the strength and life of our bodies, is certainly a most excellent way of signifying to man the principle of spiritual life, which is faith in Christ Jesus.

Bread and wine are the most expressive types of that flesh, and of that blood, which our Saviour has declared, that except we eat and drink, we shall not have life in us. When we hear then Jesus, who had called himself the bread of life, saying, that bread was his body; Why should we not understand him in a figurative sense? When we see him holding bread in his hands and hear him say, *this is my body*, why depart from the usual metaphorical language of scripture, and by taking the words literally, create a monstrous absurdity? As faith is compared to eating; so indeed with equal propriety bread may

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§ Ut quid paras dentes, et ventrem; crede et manducasti? (Trac. 5, in Joan.)

may be the symbol of the flesh of the Son of man, by whose stripes and wounds we are healed, and receive a new principle of life. Why should we on this occasion renounce common sense and adopt a meaning, which the nature of things and the tenor of the language, Jesus was wont to make use of, reprobates? What reason can there be assigned for explaining this passage differently from others of the like nature?

As our Blessed Lord proposed to institute an exterior rite to be celebrated in the congregation of the people, as a solemn remembrance of his death and passion, by which he purchased life for us; what could express more clearly, what could represent in a more lively manner the body and blood of Christ, than bread and wine? To answer the intended purpose, it was not necessary to conceal under the appearance of bread and wine the very body he assumed of the holy virgin, and that suffered on the cross; the end proposed is equally obtained by a mysterious figure. As the corporeal presence is not discerned by the eye of the body; but is allowed can only be apprehended by faith: we may likewise by faith, on celebrating the mysterious ordinance, contemplate the Lamb of the new covenant expiating on the altar of the cross the sin of the world. Grace may as efficaciously be communicated to our souls by a sacrament, a sacred sign; as if Christ himself was corporeally present. What then could determine, for reason may ask this question without impertinence, what could determine truth, goodness, and wisdom to constitute an earthly ordinance of an unsearchable nature? When Jesus exerts his omnipotent power, the effects are visible; but in the elements of the eucharist, no change is seen; the words that are pronounced

pronounced to consecrate the bread and wine, work no visible alteration; we may then boldly assert that the body of our Saviour is not really present in the sacrament; and that the substance of bread has undergone no transubstantiation.

The works of the Most High are all perfectly consistent; there can be no contradiction, no jarring in the testimonies of the Lord; an exact harmony prevails through all his dispensations. The verdict of our senses is the voice of God, declaring the nature of earthly substances; when these positively attest that what is seen, is bread; no subsequent declaration can make the first testimony false.

Enlightened reason is only at variance with the follies of the world; it is only in dissonance with errors, and absurdities; with the wisdom, and counsels of the eternal mind, it is in perfect harmony and unison. The vitiated taste, the perverted judgment may perhaps relish and approve error: but the mind, whose faculties are not depraved, can only be delighted with truth; if any disgust be felt, we may know that what creates it, is folly and error. There is an antipathy in the moral constitution of man against whatever is not according to truth; and this the all-wise Creator has designedly implanted that error may be held in abhorrence. The mysteries of God however unsearchable, and incomprehensible; yet they never clash, nor jar with the principle of wisdom that is in man.

The gospel indeed reveals mysteries, that are impetrable to the sagacity of the human understanding; but sound reason is aware not to be duped by this plea to admit under the cloak of pretended mystery, the errors  
and



and absurdities of human creation. Reason knows where it must expect to find mysteries. God is a light inaccessible; his judgments are incomprehensible, and his ways are past finding out. Amidst our present darkness as to the truths, that are only clear to the omniscience of the all-wise Being, we must walk by faith and not by sight. Beyond the bounds of a very limited sphere, all is concealed in impenetrable darkness; the light that illuminates our present state, is not sufficiently strong to unveil the mysteries of the Godhead; we can have but very faint, very faint indeed, and dim apprehensions of the eternal God and of his counsels here below: no language that man can make use of, can explain; no tongue can relate the inexpressible nature of the great Jehovah. On the word of eternal truth we must believe things that appear not; we must rely on the testimony of the Spirit of God for the knowledge of things that are not yet seen. For a clearer intuition, we must wait with patient hope for the dawn of that glorious day, when the brightness of God's countenance will shine more fully upon us; and we shall be enabled to see our God *face to face*. It is not given to us in the dark regions we now inhabit to behold the Lord of Glory face to face. The eye of the mind is dazzled; it cannot look on the blazing effulgence that surrounds the dwelling-place of the Mighty One, of the King of Kings, and of the Lord of Lords, *who dwelleth in light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen, nor indeed can see*. There must be a veil drawn between the Holy of Holies and the humble abode of weak mortals. What is for our peace and happiness, God has graciously been pleased to declare to us; and that we might believe, he has made his revelations credible by  
many

signs and wonders. Angels contemplate the scheme of Mercy, which infinite wisdom and boundless goodness have devised for the relief of lost man; and are struck with astonishment at it. The inhabitants of the earth when they see the Son of God descending from heaven and taking upon him the form of a servant, to act as the high priest of his church; when they behold this Divine person, *who is higher than the heavens, humbling himself to death, even the death of the cross*, to blot out sin, and mediate between God and his people, they startle with wonder: What they behold is so far beyond the reach of their conception; it surpasseth so exceedingly all that guilt could expect, that their belief is in suspense; they feel themselves inclined to fancy they see a spirit; that some deluding phantom imposeth on their eyes: but the voice of heaven removes all doubt; and establisheth their wavering faith. The Angel of the new covenant, whom all the prophets had pointed out, and who is powerful *in word, and work* speaks; and man is convinced that God hath truly visited his people. The mind tho' it comprehends not the mystery of redemption; yet it listens in respectful and assenting silence to the words of truth and life, that flow from the lips of the messenger of peace, who is come from the Father: he speaketh what he knoweth, and testifies what he has seen. *He that descended from heaven, and who is in heaven, speaks to us heavenly things. Man, that is of the earth, is earthly, and from the earth speaketh: he that cometh from heaven, is above all men; and what he hath seen and heard, this he testifieth to the children of men, that they may believe and inherit the promise of faith.* He whom God hath sent, speaketh the truth of God; and the

the Father hath given all things into the hands of the Son, to make it credible to all men that what he delivers is true. *We know that Jesus is come a teacher from God, for no one can do the miracles he did, unless God be with him.* The narrow and very limited understanding of man, has nothing to reply to the doctrine of the Teacher from God; for Christ speaks of things that no man hath seen, nor hath it entered into the mind of any mortal to conceive; we should then implicitly rely on the word of the infallible revealer. Reason will speak of the incomprehensible judgments of the Most High with the most timid modesty, with the deepest sense of deference; it will not be so presumptuous as to attempt to measure the immeasurable depth, and breadth of the wisdom and knowledge of God, with its narrow compasses; it were vain to try to fathom with the short line of human sagacity the immense deep of the Eternal mind. But when there is a question of earthly things and of positive ordinances, reason will not betray its trust, nor suffer the exertion of its prerogative to be shackled by *human* authority; it will make use of its scrutinizing faculty, and dictate to the mind what to believe, and what not to believe; zealous for the honour and glory of its divine Author, it will not allow the follies and errors of vain man to be ascribed to the all-wise God. As long as reason acts within its natural sphere, it is infallible; it cannot lead us astray in the regions that are well known to it. Till it comes to the boundaries of its assigned province, the mind must respectfully listen to its voice and follow its direction, and not cease to attend to its dictates till reason herself gives warning, that she is come to the limits of



her jurisdiction; that her commission goes no farther; that beyond her prescribed bounds there awaits a superior intelligence to guide and point out the way; and she delivers up herself to this more intelligent conductor, whenever he presents himself and produceth his credentials. When any revelation is said to be made, the only duty of reason is to examine into the authority that attests it; and when that is proved to be authentic, it has then no more to do than to acquiesce and captivate its powers to the obedience of faith. But in things that are of the earth, we stand in no need of any extraordinary revelation; the natural light we are possessed of is sufficient to disclose the truth to us. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is of this nature, it is a positive institution that comes within the cognizance of common sense. Reason is perfectly in order when she discusseth earthly rites, that are the object of our senses; she is within the sphere of her intelligence; she then speaks with perfect knowledge of what she says, and the verdict she gives must be true.

Nothing makes a deeper impression than the last words and actions of a beloved friend, that is going to take a long adieu. When our blessed Lord sat down for the last time, to celebrate the Passover with his disciples; as the time of his Passion was drawing near, he instituted a mystical symbol, the celebration of which would always call to their remembrance the last and most affecting moments of their Saviour. The time appointed in the counsels of Jehovah for the death of Christ, that was to take away the sins of the world, approaching; as Jesus was to meet no more with his apostles to break bread with them, taking the bread and  
wine,

wine, that had nourished his body, he tells them to eat and drink of it; that as his body had been fed by these elements, they would represent to their minds his sacred flesh, that was to be wounded for the remission of sins. He enjoins them to celebrate in remembrance of him, this, his last supper with them. He orders them to break bread together as brethren; and to drink of the cup as a memorial that would show forth the death of the Lord until he come.

Had the first believers heard of the real presence, and of transubstantiation from the apostles; we should certainly find clear marks of it in the documents of the first ages of christianity. As such a doctrine must have called forth all the attention of the new converts, they would certainly be frequently speaking of it; and would drop many an unequivocal expression, that would plainly intimate the belief that possessed their mind. Now if a candid and impartial man takes a survey of primitive christianity, he will no where, I think, perceive the faintest gleam of such an idea as real presence, and transubstantiation. Prejudiced ages may fancy they see their own phantoms countenanced by the authority of the first ministers of the gospel. Minds that are prepossessed with any fond opinion, easily mistake figurative expressions; and readily give to words meanings that were never in the thoughts of the person that uttered them. Men that are biased in favour of any system of doctrine, read with a partial eye. Words must be taken literally when they abet their notions, but if they seem to oppose them, then they must be understood figuratively; for the persuasion men are bigotted to, must be true; it must suffer no discredit from what

others may have said; the remotest generations must pay homage to established principles: and that none may be led to think they are discountenanced by ancient authority, such glosses are put upon words as will dazzle the eye, and delude the unwary to imagine the ancients saw things in the same light as they do. It were tedious to be quoting fathers; yet there are many plain passages to be found in their writings, that are a sufficient evidence that they were strangers to the doctrine of the real presence. If we rest not on the surface of words, but pry into the mind of the first believers, we shall find them to be all unanimous in their sense on the eucharist.

But how came the doctrine of the real presence and of transubstantiation into the world, and by what means did it gain universal credit? This is what I will inquire into.

When we first appear on the grand theatre of the world, we find many and various opinions, and systems of things established among men, whose origin it is always easy to trace; it is difficult to point out when, and how they underwent different modifications, and assumed the shape they appear to us in. Yet by being a little versed in the knowledge of human affairs, we may with reason presume that they have gone through many variations since their first birth. Time works a change in the features of all human affairs; and the different genius and spirit of several different ages, bring in new forms and give various appearances. Every object that ariseth to observation on the horizon of the world, as it advanceth through generations of different temper and character, is viewed through different



ferent shades, and is seen under various faces : its countenance varies imperceptibly, and the closest intuition is baffled in endeavouring to mark how the metamorphosis is wrought. If we seize any particular object that is an old stander in the world, and should be curious to investigate whence it came, and should wish to inquire into all the vicissitudes it has undergone; our researches will often be lost in the darkness and chaos of the middle ages. We may discover it before it immerses into the night, and upon its emerging we shall scarce be able to know it, so strangely it is altered. During the long night of ignorance, every sacred object was greatly disfigured ; the seeds of error, that are copiously thrown on the earth, shot up freely during that period, and filled the world with false notions and prejudices, that darken truth, and lead posterior ages into erroneous conceptions of things. Many phantoms started up in the dark, and deluded the imagination; and still hover on the earth, receiving homage as sacred realities.

For instance, we observe the sacrament of the new covenant, during the first pure ages of christianity, in its primitive shape; then if we wait to see it emerge from the dark ages, how are we astonished at the change. It comes forth quite changed, loaded with the absurdities of ignorance, and bearing the childish trappings of superstition. It is followed by a vast train of strange attendants, that have intruded themselves into its retinue on its passage. Men had been very busy during the night, in corrupting and perverting the holy covenant of the Lord, and his sacred ordinances ; and though we may not be able to discover how things are managed

amidst darkness; yet by comparing the object as it appears to us after the lapse of time, with its original form, we may know for certain whether it has suffered any violation. Though it may be difficult, yet I will try to point out, when the doctrine we are speaking of first took its rise, and how it came to be established without any great stir or opposition.

We must fix our attention for a moment on the nature of the human mind. The public, as well as the private mind, is always either advancing in improvement and knowledge, or sliding back into ignorance. When it has reached the highest degree of improvement that can be attained here below, a sensible decline may be observed from that period; and men thenceforth relapse gradually into barbarism, till they sink to the lowest pitch, from which they are to receive the retrogressive impulse to reascend. The human mind is always in a silent progressive motion, either advancing or declining; there is no fixt state in which it perpetually remains; there is no stability in the affairs of men. These are the remarks of men well versed in the knowledge of human things, and a survey of general history must convince every attentive observer of the justness of them.

The short life of an individual, is the miniature of the life of ages. Remark the progress of the mind thro' the period of one man's life. It is always imperceptibly enlarging and improving its views, till it has reached its summit. When it has attained that point it stops, and may then look back and take a retrospect of the course it has run; it may remark the striking and prominent variations of the different stages, but it cannot observe the insensible transitions, nor precisely mark the moment

moment when it passed from one degree of improvement to another. If we look back to the days of our puerility, and consider what was the state of our minds at that stage of life; then if we reflect on the frame of the mind in the years of mature manhood, what a sensible difference! When we were children, we thought and acted as such; but when we become men, we think and act otherwise. At every stage of life there are objects that engage admiration, and men are infatuated for the moment with them. What delighted our youthful days, pall in a more advanced age; and the thoughts that entertained and amused the mind in its infancy, appear foolish when years have brought wisdom. Man from his infancy is ever changing, he is in a continual state of refinement and improvement, till he comes to the height of human perfection; to that solidity of judgment, to that justness of thought that is the portion of mature age. If nothing comes across to obstruct the advancement, the mind will move on silently, and smoothly glide forward till it arrives to its zenith: it will reach the end of its career, without having its attention arrested to watch and remark its busy and incessant workings for improvement.

The mind improves its speculative views of things silently, without any stir or noise, if the workings of self-love do not counteract its operations. It is hard to form opinions that are detrimental to our interest; at least, tho' we see better things, yet it is a difficult matter to bring one's self to avow what would prove prejudicial to us. When any speculative notion is advanced, it is most commonly interest and self-love that make the noise and raise opposition. If neither of these de-



licate principles be hurt, the opinion may come forth without being molested, and will easily gain admittance to every mind and settle into its frame and habit. There is a stated period in the long life of ages, in which the public mind is fitted for every degree of improvement man can attain to. It may be clogged with various fetters, so as to move on but slowly; but tho' late, it will at length arrive to the height of liberal knowledge. Should any friendly instructor, who having broken his shackles has forerun his cotemporaries, attempt to hasten his brethren, and anticipate the moment of their deliverance from the servitude of error, and bring them to the light of truth; he will meet with discouraging difficulties in his generous endeavours. Old prejudices still cling fast, time has not yet loosened their hold; and they will make a great noise and raise a tumult if they hear themselves reproved as error; and bigotry will make the weight of its indignation fall heavy on whoever has the resolution to expose the absurdity of fond notions: enlightened men are a scandal to error; corruptions and abuses dread light, and wish to remain in darkness that their deformities may be concealed.

What is said of the mind on its progress in improvement, may be said of it on its decline. As the prospect gradually opens and is enlarged as men ascend to wisdom, it closes and contracts as they descend; and the mind goes through various modifications, and is by degrees prepared to admit any error and espouse the cause of any folly.

The public religion of nations is liable to many variations, and assumes many different appearances, according to the different spirit of the generations that have

have the management of it. It is not the wisdom and virtue of the chosen few, that have the direction of the religious concerns of the world.

As christianity spread over the nations, a tincture of heathen folly and superstition soon contaminated the religion of the gospel. Though the new converts abominated the impious practices of paganism, yet they were not purged from the old leaven; the humours of heathen superstition were still in their constitution, and could not fail to break out in some shape or other.

The worship of the statues and pictures of false Gods was indeed reprobated, but the homage that was paid to them was not abolished; it was transferred to the statues and images of saints. Men that had been accustomed to the numerous rites and ceremonies of the pagan worship, could not confine themselves to the few sacred ordinances of the gospel; they christianized, if I may be allowed the expression, many of the ceremonies and practices of the religion they had renounced, and introduced and consecrated new ones to indulge their superstitious temper.

The emperor of the east, Leo, was so much scandalized at the excesses of image worship, that in the year 727, he forbid the people to adore images. *Having assembled the people, he said publicly, that to make images was an act of idolatry, and that consequently they ought not to adore them* \*. He afterwards prohibited the worship of them by an edict. But the evil had taken too

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\* Ayant assemblé le peuple, il dit publiquement, que faire des images, étoit un acte d'Idolatrie: et que par conséquent on ne devoit les adorer. (Fleury hist. Eccl. tom. 9. livre 42.)

deep root to be removed, the attachment of the people for the idols of their superstition was too strong to be overcome by an edict. Many bishops of the east approved of the emperor's sentiments, and applauded his zeal; others condemned him. The church was divided into parties upon the subject.

The cause of the images had many strenuous advocates, who employed all the skill and ingenuity they were possessed of, in defending it. Apologies were drawn up, to vindicate the worship of images from all imputation of idolatry. But they were drawn up according to their views, abstracting from all abuses that obtained in practice. The ingenuity of human wit may refine on all corruptions, and set them in a light that may appear unexceptionable; every object, however deformed in public life, may be varnished over; and may receive from art such false dazzling appearances, as may engage the superficial observer to admire it.

The transition from the right use of images to the abuse of them, is so easy and natural, when people are any ways inclined to superstition, and they generally are, that they ought on no account to be introduced into religious service. We should chase from temples every object that can draw off attention from God, and engage the honour that is due only to him. In religious worship nothing should be permitted but what tends to refine our thoughts from earthly notions, and raise them to heavenly things; nothing should be allowed but what is efficacious to prompt every creature to adore the Almighty Lord in spirit and in truth. The great business of religious service should be to kindle in the hearts of men the fire of Divine charity; to feed and nourish  
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it by the recital of the wonders of the Most High, and by commemorating the rich mercies of our God make it blaze forth, and send up to the throne of the Almighty, a sweet odour of grateful thanksgiving. God, who knows the frame and temper of the children of men, how prone they are to superstition and idolatry, forbade his people Israel the use of images, lest they should fall into the abominations of the Gentiles; and surely after an express prohibition from God, and so many instances of nations that have fallen into superstition; no generation, that is zealous for the honour of true religion, will suffer any object to be set up that can debauch the religious sentiments of men, and turn them from the service of the living God to superstitious vanities.

But we must look into the state of the public religion of the eighth century. People were then warmly devoted to superstition, and their zeal was chiefly employed in performing rites about images. The prejudices of the eastern and western church were much hurt at the emperor's attempts to destroy their fond worship. In the east the people revolted, and attempted to dethrone him.—All the west, as pope Gregory the Third informs the emperor, was in an uproar, and highly exasperated against him: his statues were thrown down and vilified; his provinces were laid waste by the Lombards and Sarmatians; Ravenna was taken; Rome itself threatened, and all Italy was in insurrection. Thus men's minds were disposed when Constantinus Copronymus, Leo's successor, assembled a council in the year 754 at Constantinople, to take into consideration the business of the images. Three hundred and thirty-eight

eight bishops met in this synod. After a long preamble the council says, *Jesus Christ has delivered us from idolatry, and has taught us to adore in Spirit and truth: but the wicked one displeased at the beauty of the church, has insensibly brought back idolatry under the appearance of christianity, by persuading people to adore the creature and to take for God a work, to which they gave the name of Jesus Christ.* (Conc. tom. 7.) This is a plain testimony of the corruption of christianity at those times. It cannot be imagined that upwards of three hundred bishops would thus speak, did not idolatry and superstition almost universally prevail in public practice.

The fathers after the above cited words, add, *that the only true image of Jesus Christ, is that which he made himself, when on the eve of his passion he took bread, blessed it, and having given thanks broke it, and gave it, saying, take, eat for the remission of sins, this is my body: likewise when he gave the chalice, he said, this is my blood, do this in remembrance of me. To shew that he has not chosen under the heavens, any other elements or any other form, that can represent his incarnation. And what is the infinitely wise design of God in this, but clearly to shew us what he has done in the mystery of his incarnation; that as that, which he took of us, is but the human essence without any personal subsistence, not to make an addition of persons fall upon his divinity; in like manner, with regard to his image, he has commanded us to offer a chosen matter, which is the substance of bread, but without any human figure or form, lest idolatry should be introduced. As the natural body of Jesus Christ was then*  
*holy,*

*holy, being deified; in like manner it is evident that that which is his body by institution, that is to say his holy image, is sanctified in a certain manner and deified by grace. For this is what Jesus Christ has done, that as he has deified the flesh, which he took, by a sanctification, that is peculiar and natural to it, in virtue of the union: so the bread of the eucharist, being the true image of his natural flesh, becomes a divine body, being sanctified by the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the mediation of the priest, who makes the offering and renders the bread that was common, holy. It is then proved, says the council, that it is the true image of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, which he has taught us to make. (See the acts of the council, Conc. tom. 7.)*

In this passage of the Synod, the substance of bread is called the image of the natural body of Jesus Christ. The fathers certainly could not be ignorant of the belief of the church at that period, nor can it be supposed that they would misrepresent its doctrine on the eucharist. From the evidence of their words, it appears that the notions of real presence, and transubstantiation, were not known in the eighth century.

People were too fond of their images to acquiesce in what the council had said. The world was so depraved by superstition, that sound doctrine could not be relished: *men had turned away their hearing from the truth, and were turned to fables.*

A great uproar was made through the empire at the publication of the decree of the council. The zeal of bigotry was inflamed; the furies of fanaticism were roused, and a fierce opposition was formed. The fiery zealots thought religion was highly injured; they must stand



stand forth to repel the insult offered to their idols. It was imagined it would be a most acceptable service to heaven to defend at all risks the worship of images ; to sacrifice their lives in vindicating the violated honour of the sacred objects of their adoration, was thought highly meritorious. The violence and persecution, which the putting of the decree in execution occasioned ; increased the warmth of attachment and made the deluded votaries despise the severest sufferings, when the cause of the images was to be supported and defended against the impious, who had dared to exhort men to turn away from folly, to adore God in Spirit and truth ; and not offer to senseless images the honour and worship that is due only to the Lord of heaven and earth.

Public attention was now entirely taken up with the cause of the images, men were deaf to every other consideration ; they were only intent on this great and important concern ; and *according to their own desires, having itching ears*, they heaped up to themselves teachers, that could soothe their depraved minds. Whatever could be advanced to benefit the favourite cause, was eagerly received and applauded ; every mind was on the search to find something plausible to say, and whatever was in unison with the public spirit, was grateful, and was listened to with pleasure. Whoever could advance any thought to weaken and defeat the objections of the adversaries, was heard with eager ears : whatever could serve the cause was easily admitted ; there was not much investigation into the truth and justice of what was advanced ; the main point was whether the cause in which the religion of the times was so deeply concerned, could draw any advantage from it.

In

In this disposition of men's minds, the second council of Nice was convened by the empress Irenes, and Constantinus her son. Hadrianus then filled the see of Rome; Tharafius that of Constantinople. Irenes and her son were both attached to the worship of images, and Hadrianus and Tharafius warmly recommended it to them. The council first met at Constantinople, in the year 786, but as the army still adhered to the decree of the Synod, that had been held under the preceding emperor; it was thought fit and prudent to defer the setting of the council till the next year. In the mean time care was taken to prepare favourable circumstances; the empress broke and disbanded the troops, that were at Constantinople; she raised a new army, and appointed officers to command it, that were in her interest and devoted to the cause of the images. When things were thus prepared, the bishops were summoned to assemble at Nice in Bithynia. Three hundred and seventy zealots for image-worship met in council. It was easy to foresee what would be the result of the deliberations; what the resolves of an assembly, that was wholly constituted of the party that was warmly for the images. The point was prejudged in the disposition of the Synod, and no impartial discussion must be expected. The bishops, who had the preceding year opposed truth, were in great disfavour; they were considered as men that had fallen from the true faith, and were thought unworthy to sit with the orthodox fathers; and till they had repented of their past criminal conduct, and retracted their impious words, were not suffered to resume their sees and enter into their former stations.

The

The cause of the images under the auspices of imperial power, and under the countenance of grave authority triumphed, and was established without opposition; and the multitude was confirmed in their folly.

The profession of faith that was drawn up on the occasion, was acceded to by all. The pope's legates, all the bishops that were present, the empress and the emperor subscribed the decision of the council.

In the profession of faith it is said, *it is neither a council, nor the power of the emperors, nor any odious conspiracy, that has freed the church from the folly of idols, as the Judaical conventicle, that has murmured against the holy images, imagined. It is God himself, who having taken flesh, has delivered us from idolatry. We embrace the words of our Lord, of the apostles and of the prophets; by which we have learnt first to honour the mother of God, who is above all celestial powers: then the angels, the apostles, the prophets, the martyrs, to beg their intercession, as being able to recommend us to God, provided we observe the commandments of God. We receive also the figure of the cross, the reliques of the saints and their images: we embrace them according to the ancient tradition of our fathers—we honour and worship them.*

In the decision of the council it is said, *that we must salute these images, and render them the adoration of honour—offer incense, and light lamps before them.*

A strong mixture of pagan folly and superstition, is visible in all this doctrine. With what warmth would not the apostles and prophets rise up to contradict the lies that are put upon them? They would fire with holy indignation to hear the gospel of Jesus charged with



with such foolish traditions; they would sharply rebuke those that defiled the truth, and exposed the word of God to be blasphemed, by blending with it the mean trifles of foolish generations. They would fight without fear the good fight of faith; and resolutely assert that the doctrine of the infallible fathers of the Nicean assembly was in contradiction with the gospel of Jesus Christ. What! the august religion of Jesus require we should occupy ourselves in dressing up senseless images, in lighting tapers round them, in burning incense before them, in playing as children with puppets and pictures? Let no such a thing be heard in the land; such trumpery does not defile the heavenly nature of the gospel religion. The doctrine of the second council of Nice, disagrees with the word of God. There is but *one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus*: and we have free access to the Father through Him. Our Great High Priest, *is at the right-hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*. Our Divine Redeemer will not suffer us to mistrust the efficacy of his mediation, and prostrate before the shrines and images of mortals to sue for their intercession. The ears of God are open to all that call upon him in the name of his Son; we want no patron to recommend us to him. We must take heed *lest any man deceive us with vain fallacies, according to the traditions of men, according to the rudiments of this world*. The truth that has been manifested from heaven, can only be found pure in the words the apostles and prophets have recorded. The breath of their mouth must impart the heavenly wisdom, which God has been pleased to send forth upon the earth. We must only listen to the inspired men of

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God,

God, to form just apprehensions of the religion of Jesus; their words will instruct us in sound doctrine, and lead us into all truth, into all wisdom and spiritual knowledge; and though an angel from heaven were to teach a gospel, that is inconsistent with what they have delivered, we are not to believe him.

As the profession of faith and decision of the council fell in with the prejudices of the times, they were received with universal satisfaction; and the same public prejudice that had impressed marks of reprobation on those who had opposed the worship of images, stamped the council that had asserted it with the seal of approbation; and extolled them as the supports and maintainers of the true religion, against the impious men that had sacrilegiously attempted to destroy it.

The fathers having solemnly defined the worship of images to be a point of the christian institution, they proceed to answer the arguments that had been advanced against it. As to the argument drawn from the eucharist, which we have observed the council of Constantinople said, was the only image permitted by the christian religion; the second council of Nice replies, that the eucharist is not the image of the body, but the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. The literal sense of the words of the institution of the sacrament, furnished them with an answer to their adversaries: they boldly stood to the letter, and defied any one to say that Christ had not made use of these words, *this is my body, and this is my blood*. When men are close pressed for a reply to make to an objection, the faintest appearance of truth is eagerly caught at and insisted upon. To prove that the eucharist was not the image of the body and  
blood

blood of Christ, it is urged that our Saviour did not say *this is the image of my body*, but, *this is my body*. A great stress is laid on this weak foundation, that none of the apostles, none of the fathers had made use of the word image. The council rests on the surface of the words, as this perfectly answered their purpose, without going any farther; and they are applauded for defeating so ably their opponents, and confuting so forcibly their arguments.

I am now come to the point I had in view, in examining the second council of Nice. Here we find the embryo of the doctrine of the real presence begotten; and it grew up by degrees into an infallible article of faith.

As the cause, in which men's prejudices were deeply interested, was victorious; no attention was given to the intrinsic nature of the eucharist. To discuss the nature of the sacrament, was not the character of this age; people were now taken up with something else. The present matter must first be settled; the zeal and ardour of men for the present cause must cool before they can turn their thoughts to other subjects. The eucharist will afford for some later period matter of debate; things are now put in a fair way for it; and a proper bias is given to the public mind.

In the course of every debate new words are adopted; or old ones are made to bear new notions; the warmth of dispute produces many new ideas; many new conceits are struck out by the clash of opinions, which in the course of time gain the credit of unquestionable principles, and are revered as sacred. The interest of a cause may usher in, and make many new thoughts



current, without their having on first admittance passed any strict examination: these thoughts and ideas are in the beginning vague and indefinite; but being once adopted, they are by degrees wrought up into the habit of the mind, and are made the grounds of new systems.

From the period of the second council of Nice, people learnt to repeat that the eucharist was not the image of Christ's body and blood; but his own body and blood; without considering or well knowing what they said: they repeated it on the authority of their teachers, without having any clear or precise idea of what they prattled. From all parts of the empire Christians looked up to the council; and hung on its words: so that at the same period of time, the same notions and principles every where obtained and prevailed through all christendom.

Men were henceforth accustomed to hear in opposition to the reprobated, and exploded doctrine of the Ichonomachi, that the bread and wine in the eucharist, were not the image, but the body of Christ. The notions of symbol, of figure, of sign, were now carefully excluded from all discourses on the eucharist; and people are frequently warned that it is not the image but the body of Christ. For the sake of distinction, any words, that imply an idea of symbolical representation are industriously avoided; and such words only made use of, as can suggest notions agreeable to the prevailing doctrine. The principle that the sacrament was no figure or image, sunk gently into the minds of all christians, and was universally acknowledged. It was the first axiom on which succeeding generations relied; it was the indubitable and indisputable point from which writers

writers started, when they undertook to treat on the nature of the eucharist.

Men are naturally inclined to investigate the manner how things can be : when the spirit of curiosity is once roused, it is restless till it is satisfied; and the more a thing baffles the sagacity of the mind, the more invention is strained to account for it.

The writers of the ninth century, confidently resting on the established principle, that the elements of the eucharist were not the image of the body, but the very body of Christ Jesus; bent all their power of ingenuity to ascertain this truth, and worked up a system on the universally approved foundations.

Paschasius Radbertus, in the year 831, was the first in the Latin church, who seriously and copiously wrote concerning the reality of Christ's body and blood in the eucharist, as Bellarmine observes. (*De scriptor. eccle.*) He was the first in his book *de corpore et sanguine Domini*, to expound what was supposed to be believed, by asserting that the elements of the sacrament were not the image; but the very body of our Lord: he was the first that looked steadily to the consequences of that principle, and fixt the idea that was hitherto vague. He gave men's thoughts a new bias; and many afterwards undertook to write upon the same subject. It now became the favourite discussion; people's attention was now turned towards this new object, and the zeal of men began to wax warm for it. The public mind was new framed by the writers of this age: their discussions were agreeable to the genius of the times, their deductions were well drawn from the prevailing notions; they

were their natural consequences, and could not fail being readily embraced.

Paschasius drew as a consequence from his principles, that Jesus Christ was truly sacrificed every day on the altar; and the celebrating the sacred ordinance of the Lord's supper, became to be considered as a sacrifice in the strict sense of the word: a vast train of other notions followed this idea. A new spirit has now seized upon men; and the world begins to assume a new appearance.

It was easily fancied that the doctrine of the real presence had been the doctrine of all preceding ages. Every eye was now fascinated to see it plainly expressed in the words of all the generations that had gone before. They had all declared the sacrament to be the body of Christ; it was found upon inquiry that the writers of the earliest ages had called the eucharist the body of our Lord; this was thought a sufficient evidence that they believed the real presence.

What I have hitherto said will, at least it seems so to me, be a sufficient answer to the pretended demonstration of the impossibility, that this doctrine, had it been new, should ever have been received by the christian church. What has been said amounts, I think, to an evident moral demonstration, grounded on true principles, that the tenet we are speaking of, glided insensibly into the church without any change of doctrine being remarked. But it is insisted upon, that there must have been some stir and bustle about it, when it first made its appearance. Well, I grant one might expect to find some opposition to it; and there really was.

Paschasius



Paschasius himself tells us, in his book *de corpore et sanguine Christi*, that many in their minds rejected his doctrine, though they did not oppose it by writing. We learn likewise from his commentaries on St. Matthew, that there were many who were not pleased with it, and who asserted that the eucharist was not really the true flesh and blood of Christ; but that in the sacrament there was only a certain virtue of the flesh, and not the very flesh; a certain virtue of the blood, and not the very blood.

Rabanus Maurus, archbishop of Mentz, about the year 847, wrote against the assertion of Paschasius, that in the eucharist there was the very body, that was born of the Virgin Mary: in his letter to Heribaldus, bishop of Auxerres, he says; *some of late not having a right opinion concerning the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord, have affirmed, that this is the body and blood of our Lord, which was born of the Virgin Mary; and in which our Lord suffered upon the cross, and rose from the dead: which error we have opposed with all our might.* But in spite of all opposition, owing to the dispositions of the times, Paschasius carried the point, and his doctrine in progress of time settled into one of the most prominent articles of the faith of the church; and the impious and profane that dared question the incredible mystery, were imperiously commanded to be silent by the haughty tyranny of public prejudice. I shall here take leave of the real presence, and of the doctrines and traditions of men; and attend only to the truths which the spirit of God has taught. We have only to be mindful of the words which were before  
spoken

*spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall be filled with the knowledge of truth.*

By allowing myself free inquiry after christian truth, I have been led to disapprove the system of religion I had heretofore, under the fascinating influence of education, revered; and could not on my return to my native country refuse to partake of the blessings of the reformation, which the piety, and wisdom of our ancestors were so happy as to effect. When it pleased Providence to release me, together with my countrymen and brethren, from Gallic captivity, and bring me safe to my native land, I was highly delighted with the system of things that is established in England. It is upon comparison with other countries that the wisdom and virtue of this happy island appear conspicuous. To set a proper value upon the blessings enjoyed by Englishmen, one must have felt the privation of them.

I could not think of acting in the character of a Roman Catholic clergyman; I admired the established religion of the country; and I could not stand up to teach for christian truths what I was convinced was error and corruption.

Conscious of the fairness of my public character, I am not afraid of its being impeached. The gentlemen with whom I lived at St. Omer's college, will do me the justice, I am confident, to say that I behaved myself with strict decorum while amongst them. It is unpleasant, I must own from experience, to separate from those one has been brought up with, and lived in the habits of friendship and intimacy with; and for whom one has a sincere regard. But it is the duty of every  
man

man to act in obedience to the dictates of his conscience, and to speak consistently with the conviction of his mind. As we advance in improvement, light may break in upon us; and make doctrines, that were once revered as sacred, appear in the deformed shape of error. The serious thought of mature age may dissolve the delusion of prejudice, and impress deep on the soul a conviction that may make us dissent from those within whose pale we were educated. Whatever regard one may have for men, truth has an indefeasible claim to our homage, which must not be withheld upon any consideration. As a member of the christian priesthood, I must bear testimony to what I am convinced is the true doctrine of the gospel; and protest against the errors and corruptions that expose it to contempt.

